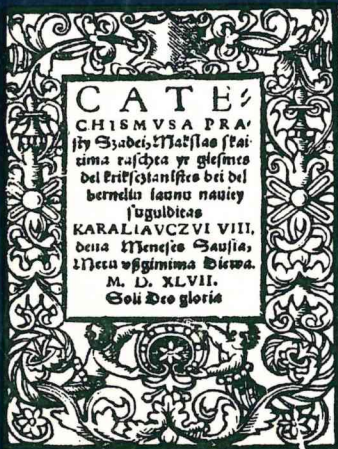
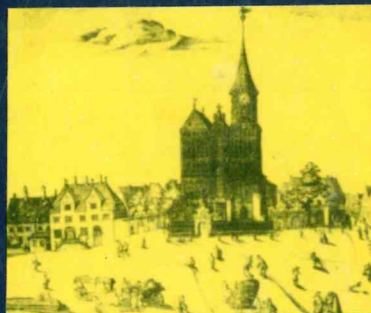


The First Lithuanian Book and Its Cultural Context

Martinus Mosvidius' *Catechismus*, 1547



Martinus Mosvidius
Parochus Ragneten
supplex



The history of every nation contains several symbolic milestones. Lithuania appeared in the history of Europe in the 13th century as a politically active state conducting, at first, its administration in written Latin, Old Slavonic and German. But the maturity of a national culture is usually associated with the time at which oral tradition is replaced by the written and printed word. The earliest known Lithuanian manuscripts date back to the beginning of the 16th century, while the first printed book in Lithuanian, Martinus Mosvidius' (Lith. Mažvydas) *Catechismus*, was published in Königsberg in 1547.

What is the significance of this event viewed in a wider perspective, especially if we bear in mind that at the time the written traditions of the neighbouring nations – Poland, Russia and Germany – were already both well developed and rich? Several answers come to mind. As is evident from the critical sources, the clash of different cultures is reflected: in the *Catechismus* we see pagan Lithuania's beliefs cross with Christianity, Catholicism with Protestantism, Polish influences with German pressures, political intentions with cultural aspirations. By its very nature, a cultural event of this kind is bound to hold great tensions, but the *Catechismus* also represents a dialogue of European cultures. In the latter sense the book is interesting for the study it affords of the cultural traditions that shaped it. Yet the publication of the first book in Lithuanian was also an act that bore witness to the determination of Lithuanians to look to the West rather than the East by adopting the Roman alphabet and joining the written traditions of Western Europe. (Political decisions had already been taken before by accepting Christianity, but these had not yet become the foundations of national culture.) Finally, the appearance of the first book in Lithuanian showed Lithuania's determination to build her own culture distinct from and resistant to the overwhelming Polish and German influences.

Such acts of determination are crucial to the independent existence and survival of a small nation. For Lithuanians their first book became an important symbol of resistance to a number of political and military occupations, because it demonstrated the depth and continuity of their national history and the right of the nation to determine its own destiny.

THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF THE FIRST LITHUANIAN BOOK



The eastern coast of
the Baltic Sea
inhabited by the
Baltic nations

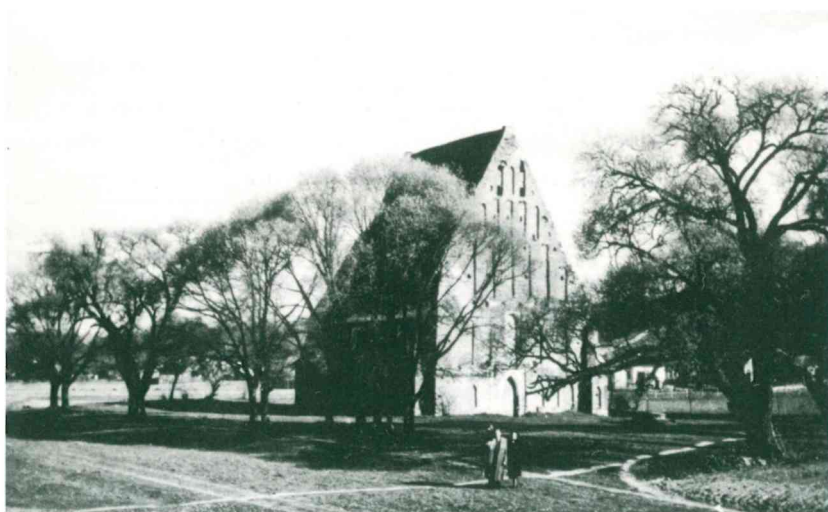
Historical background

The people inhabiting the southeastern coast of the Baltic Sea are now known as the Balts. It is a term coined by linguists, who used it to refer to one of the Indo-European language families and the corresponding ethnolinguistic community. The western Balts, known as the Prussians, inhabited the western parts of the region reaching the delta of the Vistula River as early as the Middle Ages. Tribes along the Daugava River united somewhat later to form the Latvian ethnic group, while the territory between the Prussians and the Latvians was inhabited by the Lithuanians.

The latter part of the European Middle Ages from the 10th to the 13th centuries saw the emergence of the Baltic geographical area, the boundaries of which have remained mainly the same to the present

day. Archaeological excavations in this territory have established the existence of relatively advanced agriculture and increasingly uniform methods of the cultivation of cereals, which indicate the presence of communication routes and active circulation of both population and goods. This led to the emergence of more progressive social structures, bigger territorial units, referred to as 'lands', and, on the whole, to a more progressive evolution of feudalism. These developments were similar to processes taking place in Europe at the same time, which was rising from the chaos of the early Middle Ages.

The peaceful and steady evolution of the Baltic tribes, however, was disrupted by German expansionism, which reached the Baltic lands and led to the Crusades there. In 1202, the Knights of the Sword (a branch of the Templar Order) settled on the territory of present-day Latvia and, competing with the Bishop of Riga and the Hanse, started a campaign for the subjugation and Christianization of Lithuania. Almost at the same time (1224–30), at the invitation of the Mosurian Duke, the Teutonic Order, which had been driven out of the Kingdom of Jerusalem after it lost the battle for Saint-Jean-d'Acre, settled at the mouth of the Vistula



Gothic church
in Zapyškis
(16th century)

River. The Teutonic knights engaged the Prussian tribes in battle and succeeded in occupying all their territory as far as the Nemunas River. (After World War II this region was occupied by Russia and has been known since as the Kaliningrad, formerly Königsberg, Region.) But the Prussians and the Latvians were to experience different fates: in the north the Knights of the Sword united with the Teutonic Order and, simply, Christianized the Latvians and made them serfs. After converting to Protestantism, this Germanic population evolved into a small group of big landowners who became known as the Baltic barons. The Prussians, however, who by that time, judging by their religion, had evolved into a full-fledged nation, put up a tough resistance. But in the end they were subjugated and eventually annihilated through gradual Germanization and intensive colonisation. The Prussian language died about 1700, and, perversely, the Prussian name passed on to the most militant nation of the German Empire.

Against this background of general resistance to those who spread the Gospel by the sword and by enslavement, emerged the Lithuanian nation in circumstances that were slightly different from those of its neighbours. At the beginning of the 13th century, not without major obstacles, the Lithuanians founded a sovereign centralised state, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Although by that time the expansionist ambitions of the Knights of the Sword had been curtailed and the northern borders of Lithuania were stable, for two centuries (the 13th and 14th centuries) Lithuania was forced to wage a continuous war with the Teutonic Order, which was driving east from the Prussian territory until 1410 when it was finally defeated at Tannenberg.

The Grand Duchy of Lithuania, a powerful pagan state, ruling also over a large territory of Orthodox eastern Slavs, accepted the Catholic faith at the end of the 14th century. At that time it was waging long and exhaustive wars with the Teutonic Order in the west and the increasingly more powerful Principality of Moscow in the east, and it was forced to seek the support of Poland. Closer relations between the two states began with the election of Grand Duke Jagiello of Lithuania as the Polish king. Accepting the Polish crown (1386), Jagiello pledged to introduce



The Battle of Tannenberg (1410) where the united Lithuanian-Polish forces defeated the Teutonic Order and stopped its driving to the east (17th century engraving)

Christianity in Lithuania. He fulfilled the pledge in 1387. Charged with the task, the Polish clergy accomplished it formally by introducing Christian religious institutions without bothering very much about what local population's beliefs were. The result was a peculiarly peaceful coexistence of paganism and Christianity. Officially, state officers and noblemen recognised the Almighty of the Christian world, but they did not interfere at all with the adoration of pagan gods, so-called 'domestic gods', by the populace. This situation lasted well into the 15th and 16th centuries, until the beginning of the Reformation movement.

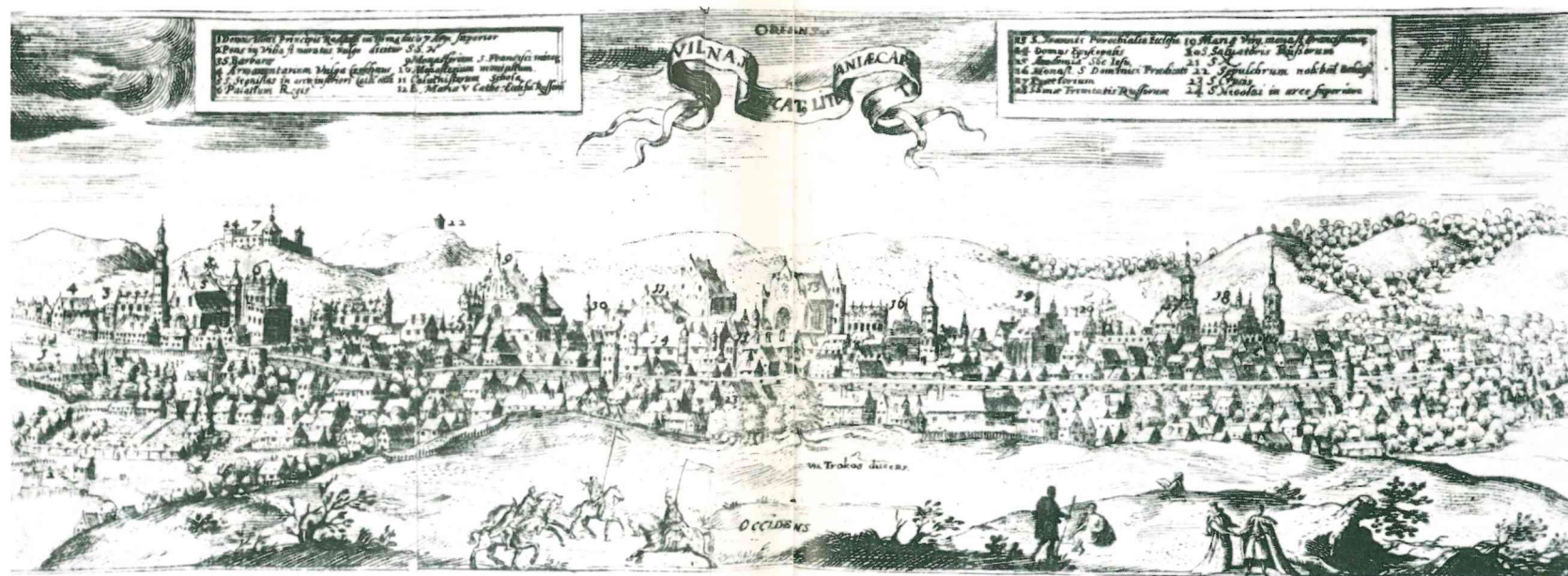
Vilnius in the 16th century

After its Christianization in the 14th century, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania entered into a dynastic union with the Kingdom of Poland. This ambiguous situation lasted until 1569 when, threatened with the extinction of the Jagellonian dynasty, both countries signed the Lublin Treaty and concluded a final union. This was a fatal act which led to the gradual erosion of the sovereignty of Lithuania despite the existence of two parallel governments, two armies and two administrations. By the end of the 18th century, the federal Polish-Lithuanian Republic was declining slowly but steadily, and was eventually partitioned between its great neighbours – Germany, Austro-Hungary and Russia, the latter taking the lion's share.

In the 16th century Lithuania was a multi-ethnic state with its capital Vilnius, a big city of 20,000 inhabitants, dominated by the steeples of numerous Catholic churches interspersed with the onion domes of Orthodox churches, the minarets of mosques and the façades of synagogues. It was the metropolis of a well-organised and well-administered state, ruled

by a few noble families, the Radivillus, Gasztoldus, Pac and Sapieha. The official language of the Office of the Grand Duke was Old Slavonic, which later, after some hesitation about the introduction of Latin, was replaced by Polish, the language of the Church and, increasingly, of the nobility and the gentry. Nonetheless, state rulers returning to Vilnius would be pompously welcomed with Lithuanian hymns. The Jews, who had come to Lithuania at the invitation of the Grand Dukes, spoke Yiddish, and the Tartars prayed in mosques in Arabic. It was a European Renaissance city with its gates open to the East.

Religious concord reigned in the capital and the whole country, stemming from the tradition of tolerance inherited from pagan times when the Lithuanian dukes sent to rule over Slavonic cities would peacefully convert to the Orthodox religion only to return to paganism when back at home. This traditional religious tolerance went hand-in-hand with an understanding of ethnic interests. Tolerance towards Orthodox believers, who, together with Catholics, participated in the work of various state institutions, was later extended towards Protestants as well.



Vilnius.
Engraving by
T. Makowski
(1600)

The title page of the New Testament from *Biblia Brzeska* (1563).

It was published in Polish by Nicolaus Radivillus Niger in his printing shop in Brestia

The Reformation movement reached the Grand Duchy of Lithuania soon after its emergence in Germany. In Lithuania, it was active for about a century and affected not only the views of the population, but also the economy and politics of the state. Even before the beginning of the Reformation, Lithuania had been familiar with the ideas of the Renaissance, and people there created secular literature, wrote historical chronicles and poetry, although not in Lithuanian. Christianity had had little impact on the population of Lithuania, particularly its lower stratum, which became an additional argument of Protestantism against the mostly Polish clergy engaged in the unsuccessful introduction of Catholicism.

As early as 1520, the Kingdom of Poland began to issue edicts prohibiting the circulation of Protestant writings and studies at Wittenberg University. In 1535, these edicts also became effective in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Still, the religious struggle, conducted mostly in the form of discussions, at least around the middle of the century, continued rather

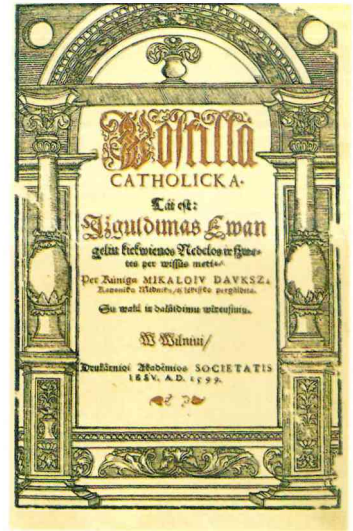
peacefully: the Protestants had strong patrons and influential supporters – the Radivillus and other aristocratic families of the Grand Duchy – because the Reformation movement went hand in hand with aspirations for independence from Poland. In 1563, before a similar act in Poland, the Seimas (Parliament) of Vilnius adopted a privilege that granted freedom of religion to all faiths without any exception. At about that time, Lithuania became the centre of the most radical Reformation trends in Europe.

The Reformation awakened Lithuania from cultural stagnation, inspired its social thought, literature and written language, stimulated its Catholic adversaries toward cultural activities, and in general, brought Lithuania closer to Europe. Lithuania can take pride in the fact that for a certain time in the latter half of the 16th century it was, from the political and religious point of view, the centre of Christian European liberalism and progressive religious thought.



The cultural upswing of Lithuania can be explained by the active dialogue between different faiths, which lasted for several decades and stimulated various cultural projects of the debating or, rather, competing parties. But we should also remember that in 16th century Vilnius not only Protestant and Catholic ideas intermingled. It was also a city where people of different nationalities lived side by side and communicated closely. The capital of the Grand Duchy became an important centre of Slavic and Jewish culture. It was here that Franciscus Skoryna, a Byelorussian with views similar to Protestantism, published his first books in 1522. Vilnius became a refuge for Ivan Fedorov, the famous Russian printer, who fled from Moscow after a mob incited by monastic scribes who feared competition had destroyed his printing shop. In a short time, Vilnius became the second Basel where printers competed with each other in printing books in different languages proclaiming conflicting beliefs. Freedom of opinion was surprisingly broad here; side by side with the Catholics, the Calvinists pursued their very broad activities, Orthodox monks had their own printing shop where they printed treatises against Catholicism.

Nevertheless, the Counter Reformation gained the upper hand in Lithuania at the end of the 16th century mainly because Poland was very much interested in maintaining Catholicism in this region and in strengthening the state union. To fight against the Reformation pro-Catholic forces invited the Jesuit Order to Lithuania. It immediately started to build a higher educational system as a counterbalance to Protestant schools, and founded a college that was promoted to the status of an academy in 1579. The success of the Counter Reformation can also be explained by the fact that in Lithuania the Reformation had affected mostly the higher stratum of society, so that much depended on the will of individual dignitaries. But even ousted from the state arena, the Protestants were able to survive on the land holdings of individual landowners. Pockets of such believers have survived to the present day.



A Postil by Mikalojus Daukša (1599), one of the first Lithuanian books in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The plate of this title page with a Renaissance arch of triumph was also used in printing Ivan Fedorov's book *Apostle* (1564), the first book published in Russia, and the *Lithuanian Postil* (1600) issued by the Protestants. Thus, the same form of design was used with different texts in religious books of three religions

East Prussia

In 1525, the last Grand Master of the Teutonic Order, Albrecht of Brandenburg, proclaimed Prussia a secular state and, in two years, introduced Protestantism as the official state religion. It was ordered that sermons in Prussian churches should be preached in the vernacular. As the country was inhabited by the descendants of Prussians, colonised by the Germans, and a considerable number of Lithuanians (the territory was referred to as Eastern Prussia, or Lithuania Minor), efforts were made to develop the Lithuanian and Prussian languages. At that time, Prussia was politically dependent on Poland, whereas its relations with Lithuania were rather good. In order to get rid of this dependence and to expand his own political influence, Duke Albrecht supported the Reformation movement in Lithuania and Poland, taking care of the enlightened, and making efforts to ensure the training of Lithuanian pastors who could work not only in Prussia but also in Lithuania. In 1544, he founded Königsberg University, which he also advertised widely in Lithuania. To spread the Word of God in a language that people could understand, it was also necessary to have literature for the believers. Albrecht's initiative gave the surviving Prussians a catechism in Prussian (1545), and efforts were made to write a Lithuanian catechism, although Lithuanian was not considered to be a language much different from Prussian.

Little by little, Duke Albrecht rallied a group of active, enlightened Lithuanians and created suitable conditions for their work. The idea and possibilities of writing and publishing the first Lithuanian book must have been born in this environment. Soon Mosvidius was invited to Königsberg.

One of the Lithuanians supported in this way by Duke Albrecht was Abrahamus Culvensis, born circa 1510, who was a former student of Melancthon, Luther's like-minded colleague in Wittenberg. Culvensis returned to Lithuania at a very propitious time – when young Grand Duke Sigismund August of Lithuania and his mother Bona lived in Vilnius. Culvensis impressed Queen Bona and she helped him found a college-type school in 1539. Culvensis' ambition was to play in Lithuania a role similar to that played by Luther in German lands. Culvensis



En faciem Magni Duas M. DEPT. venerandum
ad Nugas refutares ad P. N. statim
Accipe, quia Tibi nunc submisit, MICHOL
Nomen Miganum, FACTOR ego, refere
Anno MDCXXXI. Johannes Brenhardus, laudat
Mense Febr. Ad. Albert. Secunda Redor.

Duke Albrecht of Brandenburg (1490–1568) who funded the publication of the first Lithuanian book and the only three Prussian books

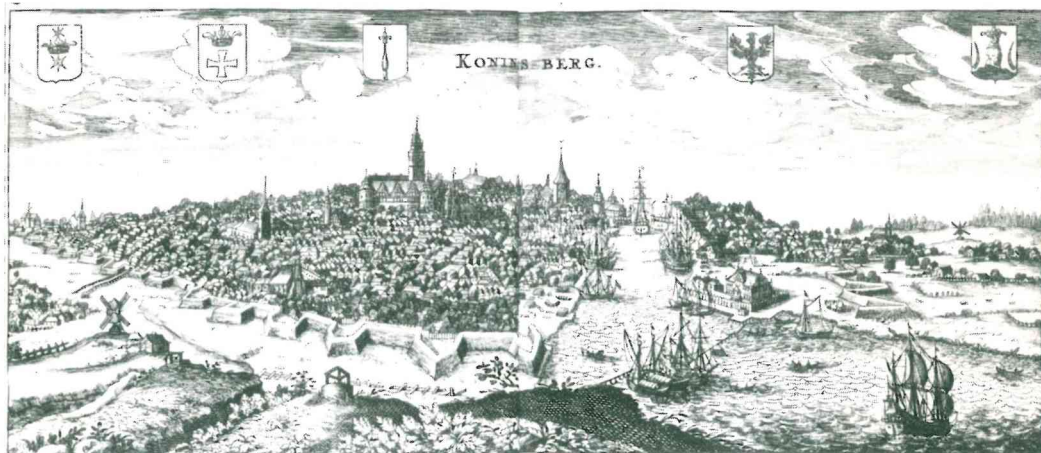


The first Prussian catechism (1545)

proclaimed Protestant ideas publicly from the pulpit and attacked Catholic priests. When the Queen left Vilnius, the confrontation between the Protestants and the Catholics became more intense for several years. Then Culvensis left for Königsberg, where he became Count Albrecht's adviser and, soon, vice-rector of the preparatory school that was to be reorganised into a university. This was done in 1544 by establishing Königsberg University. Culvensis was appointed to head the Chair of Greek Language. When the persecution of Protestants in Lithuania subsided, Culvensis returned to Vilnius for a short time in 1545 and ardently joined religious disputes there, but he died suddenly in that year.

Together with Culvensis at Königsberg University, there was another prominent Lithuanian educator of the 16th century, Stanislaus Rapagelanus. He also studied at Wittenberg. It is noteworthy that Luther made the opening speech at the public dispute during the presentation of Rapagelanus' doctoral theses in 1544. After he returned to Königsberg University, Rapagelanus was appointed head of the most important chair at the University, the Chair of Theology. Rapagelanus was one of the most educated and enlightened professors of Königsberg University. He apparently started translating the Bible into Lithuanian; later, Mosvidius included one of the hymns translated by Rapagelanus into his hymn book.

Königsberg
(17th century
engraving)



THE FIRST LITHUANIAN BOOK



Nemunas – the
river separates
Lithuania from
Eastern Prussia on
the other side

The life of Martinus Mosvidius

The exact date of Mosvidius' birth is not known, but it is believed that he was born no later than 1520. The first established date in Mosvidius' biography is 1546 when the Duke of Prussia sent him a letter inviting him to Königsberg. During his visit to Vilnius a short time before, the Duke had approached Jonas Bilevičius, a Lithuanian nobleman favourable to the Reformation and had asked him to find a few educated young men who could speak Lithuanian and would like to become Protestant pastors in Eastern Prussia. Accepting the Count's invitation Mosvidius arrived in Königsberg where he matriculated at the University on August 1, 1546.

Mosvidius was not an ordinary student, which can be surmised from a letter Count Albrecht wrote him in which he addressed him as an "honourable and educated" man. Mosvidius graduated from the University in under two years and was granted a Bachelor's degree. He was in the first group of graduates of Königsberg University, which included seven people. Mosvidius was the only Lithuanian among them. It is a well

known fact that soon after he started his studies at Königsberg University, Mosvidius handed in his *Catechismus* for publication at the beginning of 1547.

It is not clear where Mosvidius was educated before he came to Königsberg. At that time, many young Lithuanian gentry attended Cracow Academy or the universities of Germany and Italy. Mosvidius' name, however, has not been found among them. One thing seems certain – he could not have studied in Germany because even after his graduation from Königsberg University he wrote in a letter to Duke Albrecht: "I don't speak German at all," but "I say I know my mother tongue perfectly well." There is no doubt, however, that he knew Latin and Polish because he used Polish sources while writing the *Catechismus* and preparing other books for publication. Mosvidius may have been educated at one of the estates of a Lithuanian dignitary, possibly at the College established by Culvensis. Whatever the case may be, Mosvidius seems to have been well known among the Calvinists and had earned the title of Protomartyr, i.e. the first martyr. He added the title in signing a letter to the Rector of Königsberg University, although there is no direct evidence of Mosvidius' persecution or punishment.

Much of the information we have about Mosvidius' life in Prussia comes from his letters. We know Mosvidius was a poor man – entering



An old house (1546) in Königsberg demolished around 1900. Photo from the end of the 19th century



Königsberg University in the 19th century

the University he paid the smallest matriculation fee and he received a grant from the Duke while studying in Königsberg. Poverty and misery were to dog Mosvidius all his life. He always mentioned this in his letters. For example, after he had already graduated from the University, he approached the Rector of the University in the autumn of 1548 asking him to procure some suitable clothes for him from the Duke, for winter was approaching and he had “only torn and very shabby” ones. Some time later, he wrote to the Duke himself complaining that he could not stay in Königsberg any longer: “Due to the miserly grant I can no longer live here in any suitable manner.”

In the spring of 1549 Mosvidius was appointed pastor of Ragainė parish, which at that time was still a completely Lithuanian district. There he met the eldest daughter of the previous German pastor who had died a few years before leaving a large family. According to tradition, Mosvidius had to marry her and had to pledge to take care of her brothers and sisters to the end of his life. His material circumstances were never quite easy, and more than once, Mosvidius was forced to ask the Duke for some

Ragainė at the beginning of the 17th century. On the right is Mosvidius' church. Engraving from: Ch. Hartknoch, *Alt und Neuer Preussen oder Preussischer Historien zwei Teile*



sort of support; for in-stance, to be given better and more closely located farm land. At the end of his life, Mosvidius wrote to the Duke asking him to be freed from unsuccessful farming and given an annuity from the state treasury. The Count, however, refused Mosvidius' request.

Mosvidius' parishioners also gave him a lot of trouble. As he put it, they "thought little of Christian religion, and understood nothing at all about the prayer to God and the canons of faith;" they, he said, tried to evade practising religion, and thus church attendance was very poor. Mosvidius admitted that he had little hope of achieving any definite progress in his parishioners' religious habits. According to Jurgis Gerullis, a researcher of Mosvidius' heritage, the conflict was aggravated by the fact that "the Lithuanians had changed their religion not of their own free will but were forced to do so by the authorities. The day before they had been Catholics, the next day they were called Protestants. They seemed, however, to have remained what they had been: poor, overworked, and undernourished wretches; they did not care about the religious struggles of their lords; unlike the clergy, they simply had no time for scuffles or abuses over such problems" (*Tauta ir žodis*, IV, 1926, p. 426–27).

It is not known whether Mosvidius ever visited Lithuania Major after his appointment in Ragainė, but the dedications in his books indicate that, in general, he had the Lithuanian reader in mind. His books seemed to circulate all over Lithuania, which was becoming more and more involved in the Reformation movement.

Mosvidius' books, his letters of high epistolary standards and other authentic facts of his biography allow us to consider him to have been a man of considerable erudition and literary culture, educated in the humanistic tradition characteristic of his time. On becoming pastor of Ragainė parish, he did not terminate his "studies" so as to be able to continue producing religious books in Lithuanian which were necessary for Protestant churches both in Prussia and Lithuania. That was the reason why he was supported by the highest authorities of Prussia. Mosvidius died in Ragainė on May 21, 1563.



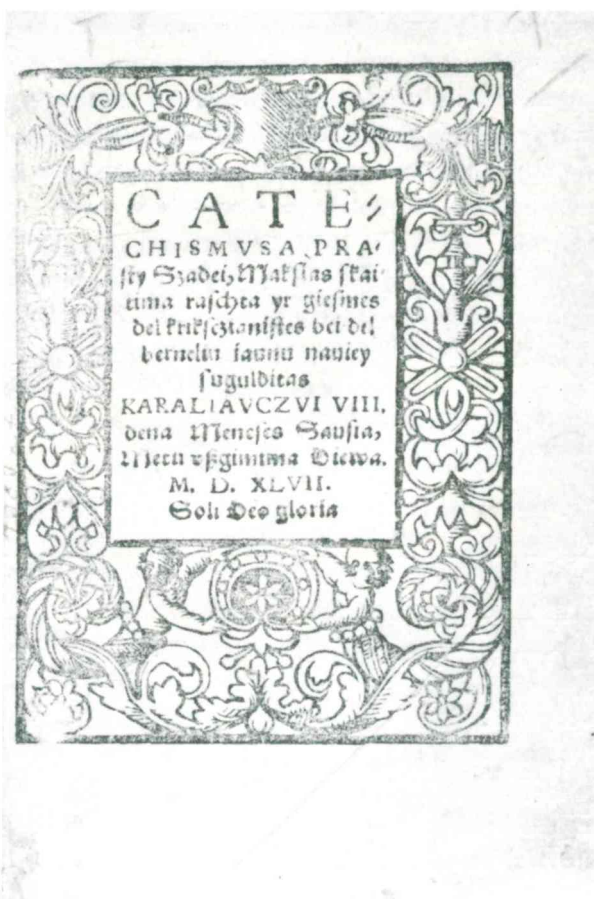
Mosvidius' church today

Mosvidius' Works

On the basis of the most recent bibliographic data, it is possible to make up the following list of Mosvidius' works:

1. CATECHISMVSA PRASTY SZADEI... (Königsberg, H. Weinreich's printing shop, 1547, 79 pp.) – the first Lithuanian book, referred to simply as the Catechism. At present, there are two original copies extant, one in the Library of Vilnius University, the other in the Library of Toruń University, Poland (sign. Pol.6.II.189).

The title page of the
Catechismus by
Mosvidius. The
format of the book is
18 × 11 cm

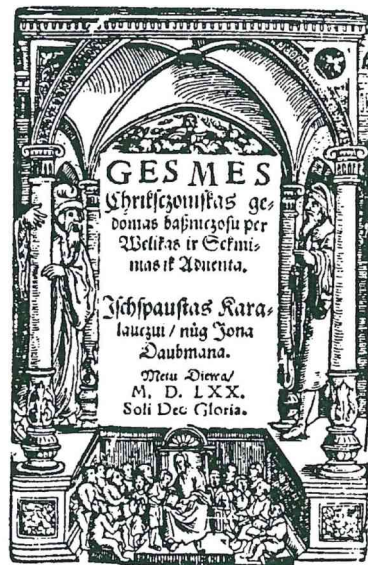
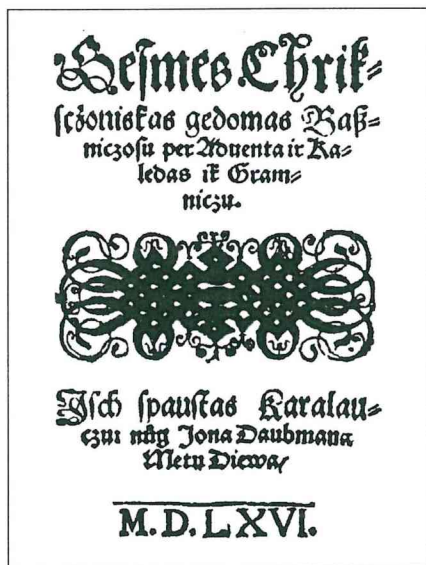


2. GIESME S. AMBRASEIJAUS BEI AUGUSTINA... (Königsberg. H. Weinreich's printing shop, 1549, 16 pp.) – a publication of three hymns which are also included, in a slightly expanded version, in Mosvidius' hymn book. The original copy is in the Kurnik Library, Poland (sign. Cim.0279).

3. FORMA CHRISITIMA (Königsberg. J. Daubman's printing shop, 1559, 42 pp.) – the original copy is in the Library of Toruń University (sign. Pol.6.II.5 adl., Pol.6.II.190 adl.)



4. GESMES CHRISKSCZONISKAS (Königsberg. J. Daubman's printing shop, 1566, 1570). The foreword carries the signature of Mosvidius as the publisher, but actually the book was published by Baltramiejus Willentas three years after Mosvidius' death. Except for two pieces, the first part (94 pp.) includes Mosvidius' own hymns. There is no conclusive evidence whether Mosvidius intended to publish this book in two parts. The first part includes hymns sung between Advent and Christmas to Gramnyczu (in February). The second part includes hymns sung between Easter and Advent (350 pp.) and was published by Willentas without indicating that the book was written by Mosvidius. Traditionally, however, the second part is also attributed, with certain reserva-



tions, to Mosvidius. It is a large book of hymns, the preparation for publication of which must have consumed a considerable time. The main source of the hymn book was Luther's *Geistliche Lieder* (1553), but works of other Protestant poets were used as well. It also includes translations from German, Latin, Polish, probably some additional original hymns. The book includes several prayers.

5. PARAPHRASIS... (Königsberg. G. Osterberger's printing shop, 1589, 14 pp.) – Mosvidius' translation of *Paraphrasis des Vater unsers*, taken from Prussian agenda *Kirchen Ordnung* (1558, II, 23 pp.). The original copy is in the Library of Uppsala University (sign. 123.322).

P A R A P H R A S I S,
permanitina poteraus mal-
da / per Martina Mosvi-
da ischgulbita.

Meli prietelei Chri-
staus / iog mes czonai war-
dana Pono suffirinkome /
idant io schwenta Testamentaprie-
imtumbin / Graudindams todelei
isch pradzas ius praschau / idant
ius / Schirdis iusu / Dietvop patile-
tumbit / ir drauge su manimi kalbe-
tumbit / Malda ponischka / tū budu
kaip mus Christus musu Ponas
patis ischmofinna / ir tikra ischslau-
sima aphadeia.

Melstem tapirmiaus / idant
Dietwas / musu danguiesu Tewas /
K ant

Mosvidius' *Catechismus*

The first Lithuanian book is a publication of small format (18×11 cm) including 79 pages, printed in Gothic lettering (except for some titles and the text in Latin). The Latin text is printed very evenly, but the Gothic letters of the Lithuanian text are often uneven and not clearly printed; technically, the printing shop must have been of very poor quality. Insufficient attention was paid to typefaces: when running out of one typeface the printers simply replaced it by another. The number of copies printed was probably somewhere between 200 and 300. The book has been reprinted several times for scholarly purposes.

The first Lithuanian book is not only a catechism as the title indicates. It also includes the first original text in Lithuanian written in verse (such as the foreword), the first Lithuanian primer and the first collection of Lithuanian hymns (it is believed that Mosvidius was not the author of all the hymns). The author of the book is not indicated in the title page, but J. Safarewicz has deciphered the author's name in acrostic in the foreword written in verse: MARTJNVS MASVJDJVS. Linguists Ch. Stang and E. Fraenkel have established that the text of the *Catechismus* is largely a faithful literal translation from Polish catechisms by J. Seklucian (1545) and J. Malecki (1546). Latin sources were also used.

The book begins with a dedication in Latin to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. This is an indication that the author had the reader in Lithuania Major more in mind than the reader in East Prussia. The epigram speaks about the severity of the Last Judgement Day, and calls on people to convert to Protestantism.

The dedication to
the Grand Duchy of
Lithuania in the
first book

AD MAGNUM DVCATVM LITVANIAE

*Paup'ra ducum magnorum alitrix, Litvania clara,
Hec mandata Dei, suscipe memento pia,
Ne te, cum dederis rationes ante tribunal
Augustum, magni iudicis ira premat.*

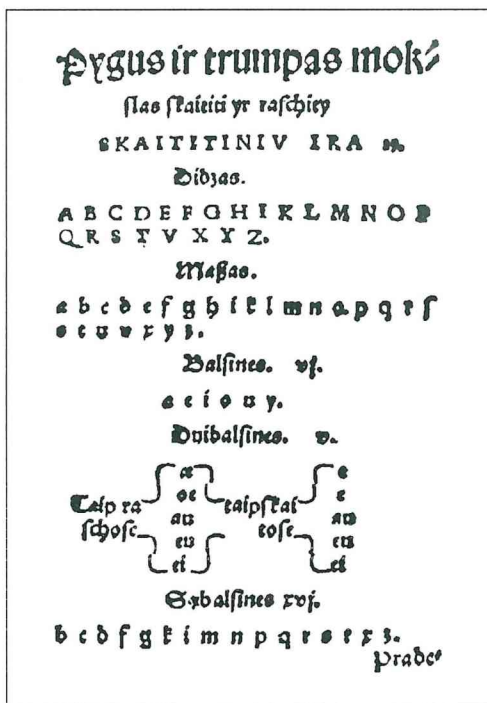
There are still some doubts concerning the identity of the author of the Latin foreword "To the guardians and servants of Lithuanian churches..." Researchers think that it may have been written by Fridericus Staphylus, a professor of theology at Königsberg University, who had lived in Lithuania and knew Lithuanian quite well. The Foreword criticises the Roman Catholic Church, which allows only priests to read the Bible, emphasises the benefits of the catechism as a primer of faith, and expresses re-

grets about the estrangement of Lithuanians from the true faith through their pagan beliefs and rites, which they practice quite frequently. We shall separately discuss in greater detail the Lithuanian Foreword written in verse.

The book also includes a Lithuanian primer with an alphabet adapted for the first time to Lithuanian sounds, which clearly follows the Latin pattern.

The *Catechismus* itself is composed of the Ten Commandments, prayers, a few excerpts from the Bible, which represent the first attempts at translating the Bible into Lithuanian, and some other texts.

The largest part of the *Catechismus* is taken up by eleven hymns presented together with music in mensural notation. Investigators think that this collection of hymns was compiled by several people. Translations may have been made by Rapagelanus, Culvensis, and others, but certainly the largest number of the hymns must have been translated by Mosvidius himself.



The first
Lithuanian
alphabet
printed in
Mosvidius'
Catechismus

The Foreword in Verse

The first line of the Foreword “Brothers and sisters, take and read me” has become a poetic cliché paraphrased in an infinite number of ways. At first glance, this Foreword is a collection of primitive admonitions, phrased in an obsolete language that is difficult to understand. It is written in the form of a conversation or argument, with questions and the hypothetical answers of an interlocutor. The reader finds himself in the middle of a debate, and is advised to make a decision in favour of the faith advanced by the Reformation. The book addresses three different social strata of readers – the peasant, the landlord and the priest. The greatest part addresses the peasants, for they still need to be convinced of the advantages of the new creed. The advocate of this creed is, naturally, reluctant to permit a free choice between the old pagan gods and the new God. But his interlocutor does not agree with him. He says that the pagan customs, i.e. traditional life, is dearer

to his heart. It is noteworthy that in the dispute female pagan deities are opposed to the male Christian God to the disadvantage of femininity.

The nobility is addressed with the request not only to tell people to attend church, but also to keep an eye on pastors and ensure that they teach people properly; if pastors fail in their duties, the nobility itself should try to spread the new religion.

But the most important thing is man’s ability to read and understand the truth of faith himself. Earlier, in the absence of printed books, the propagation of faith depended on the will of lords and pastors; now, the simple man will be able to do it himself because he has a book, which is becoming the most important means in the propagation of Christianity. The book marks, in general, the beginning of a new and innovative stage of culture in which the flow of history can be clearly felt, it is the demarcation line between things that were and things that are to be; that is, between the past and the future.

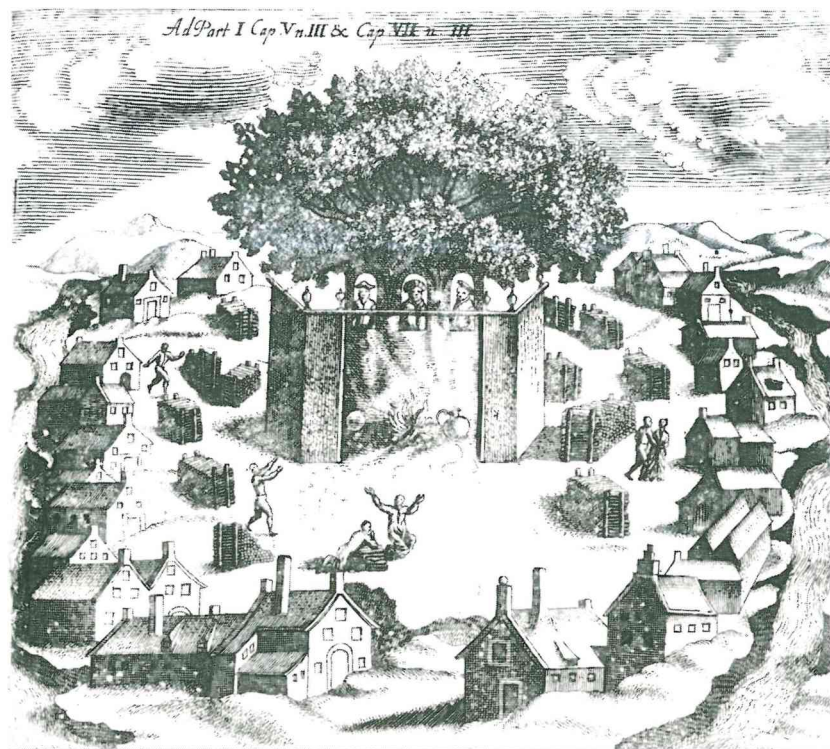
The Foreword to the *Catechismus*, the first printed secular poem in Lithuanian

KNIGIELES

Paciaso byla Lietuvinisump ir
Schemalsump.

B Kalei sėseris imkiet mani ir šlaititiet/
Ir catai šlaitidami permankiet.
Makla schio cewai iuso traktidawa euret.
Ale co negaleia ne wena budu gauri.
Regieri co narela sawa atimisi/
Caiyyr ischigirski sawa ausimis.
Jau nu ta cewai nakaba neregleia/
Tu schieai wiso iusump atcia.
Dejdekiet ir dabakietes gimines wysas
Schieai eic iusump sadis dagads karalistas
Malanei ir su dyiautsumo co fiadi prigintike
A iusu hutinsu schemina makitiet.
Sunas dulceris iusu tur catai matiety
Wisa schyrdy tur co dewa fiady miletu.
Jei bralei sėseris eus fiadyus nepapektis
Dewa tewa ir sonu saw milu padatijie.
Ir paschlawint pa atimis dewa busie.
Wifosu daitrosu palaimi euresie.
Schiu maklu dewa titrai pasyffe
Ir degads karalistas priesaryffe.

Teufter



A place of
worship of the
Prussian gods.
Engraving from:
Ch. Hartknoch,
*Alt und Neuer
Preussen oder
Preussischer
Historien zwei
Teile*

Mosvidius wrote his Lithuanian Foreword in a syntactical-international versification system based on the similarity of the syntactical structure of lines, which predetermines the similarity of the intonation, while the number of syllables and the distribution of accents is not exactly defined.

Thus, the Foreword of 112 lines today symbolizes the beginning of the printed Lithuanian word, as well as the beginning of Lithuanian secular poetry. To the historian interested in the history of culture the Foreword offers rich material about the confrontation of Catholicism and the Reformation in Lithuania. To the ethnologist, it gives much information about old beliefs, and contemporary norms of morality and social relations. It is also one of the earliest attempts to articulate Christian culture in Lithuanian, marking the passage from spoken to written language.

The first Lithuanian periodical *Aušra* (1883) printed in East Prussia (Tilsit). It became the symbol of Lithuanian national rebirth



Before the Second World War, the region where Mosvidius had lived belonged to Germany and was referred to as East Prussia. In the history of Lithuanian culture this region was important not just in Mosvidius' time. In the 18th century, it supported broad Lithuanian cultural activities, publication of religious books, grammars and dictionaries, recording of folklore and so on. The most important cultural event was the publication of *The Seasons* (1765), a long poem in hexameter and the masterpiece of Lithuanian literature by Pastor Kristijonas Donelaitis, who transferred He-

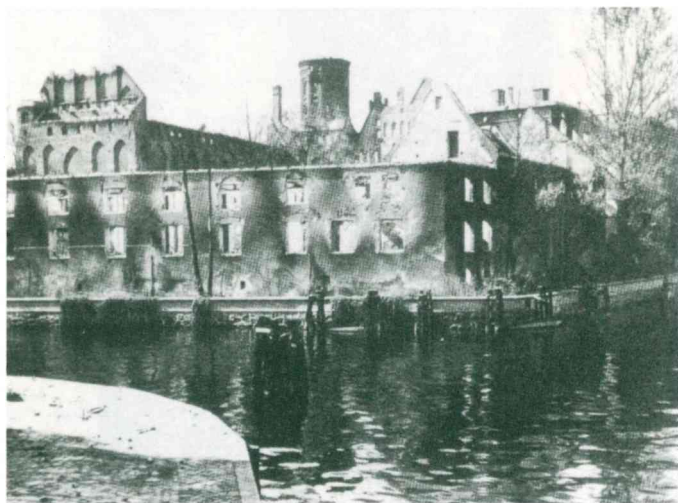
siod's and Dellile's cherished themes into a Lithuanian context.

In the 19th century, Lithuania, incorporated into the Russian Empire after the partitioning of the Polish-Lithuanian state in 1795, was drained by successive, honourable, but hopeless, uprisings. After the uprising of 1863, which sought to restore the Polish-Lithuanian state and was supported large numbers of peasants, the Czarist authorities prohibited the publication of Lithuanian books in Roman alphabet (Lithuanian books were allowed to be published only in the Cyrillic alphabet). The ban met with an unexpected and tough resistance that lasted for all of its 40 years: religious and, later, secular books began to be published in East Prussia, where the majority of the population in border regions was still Lithuanian, and smuggled them into the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania. A class of professional 'book carriers' emerged. They were cruelly persecuted by the Russian gendarmes – more than 2000 people were punished not only for smuggling books, but also for reading them. This type of resistance, which was at first more religious than patriotic, played an extremely important role: the mutiny against the Russians became not only wider and more popular, but it also made the Lithuanians accustomed to seeing written texts in their own language, and in Roman characters at that. Very soon it became their primary symbol for identifying themselves with Europe.

In 1883, twenty years after the 1863 uprising, *Aušra*, the first Lithuanian periodical of secular patriotic content, was published in Tilsit, a

small town in East Prussia on the Lithuanian border, to be followed soon by other publications in Lithuanian. The year 1883 is actually the recognised date marking the beginning of the rebirth of the Lithuanian nation. Thus, the Lithuanian national and cultural revival began in a place where Protestant and Catholic cultures intermingled, which is evidence that religious differences were no obstacle to dialogue and projects in common. In one form or another, this situation lasted until the Second World War when the Prussian territory became part of the Soviet Union and the local population, including the Lithuanians who lived in East Prussia, were replaced almost entirely by newcomers from Russia.

Mosvidius' *Catechismus* and his other writings are specially important monuments of Old Lithuanian, and as such they are continually subject to the scrutiny of Baltic linguists. In addition to linguistic information, these texts offer ample material for studies by ethnographers and experts in religious history; the hymns and the forewords written in verse are analysed from the point of view of the history of versification. Mosvidius' dramatic life, his dedicated efforts to see Lithuanian books published have become popular plots for contemporary Lithuanian fiction. Finally, today Mosvidius and his works, along with *The Seasons* of Donelaitis, are seen as landmarks reminding us of the vanished country of East Prussia.



Königsberg
after the
Second
World War

The Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania has proclaimed 1997 the Year of the First Lithuanian Book. The date is to be marked not only in Lithuania, but also in present Kaliningrad, oblast of Russia, where the church building of the former Ragainė parish, served by Pastor Mosvidius, survives to the present day. The highlight, however, of the observation of this historical date will take place in Lithuania: a special programme of publishing Old Lithuanian texts has been launched. Under the programme, a new facsimile publication of Mosvidius' works has already appeared and other works important to Lithuanian and Baltic studies (including both manuscripts and publications in other languages associated with Lithuania) are being prepared for or are already in the process of publication.

Kristijonas Donelaitis' restored church in Tolminkiemis in the territory of former East Prussia, now Čystyje Prudy (Russia)



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Front cover: The title page of Martinus Mosvidius' *Catechismus*
Martinus Mosvidius' signature
The Cathedral of Königsberg
Back cover: The map of the region by T. Makowski (1613)

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